

ARIZONA VETERANS TASK FORCE
Thursday, December 15, 2005 - 1:00 p.m.
Governor's 2nd Floor Conference Room
1700 W. Washington - Phoenix, AZ 85007

M I N U T E S

Call to Order

Chairman Pat Chorpenning called the meeting to order at 12:59 p.m.

Roll Call

The following members were present:

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| ▪ Patrick F. Chorpenning, Chair | ▪ Rebecca J. Phifer, Co-Chair |
| ▪ Joe P. Bibich | ▪ Dora Schriro (in at 1:42 p.m.) |
| ▪ George J. Heaney | ▪ Joan E. Sisco |
| ▪ Avtar Khalsa | ▪ Gary M. Yaquinto |
| ▪ Ezra Loring | ▪ Caryn R. Walsh |
| ▪ Georganna Meyer | |

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the November 30, 2005 were approved as corrected. The corrections were on page 3 of the draft minutes distributed:

- The appropriation of \$125,000 (bullet #6) was deleted because it was recorded twice. Added "the motion carried unanimously" to bullet #7 for the record.

Review of Executive Order 2005-15

Co-Chair Phifer reviewed the requirements specified by Governor Napolitano in her Executive Order that established the Veterans Task Force (VTF). Directive #6 required clarification, requiring the VTF to "develop a plan to educate Arizona state and local leaders about issues of importance to Arizona veterans."

The VTF satisfied this requirement in its recommendation to provide up to ten one-stop veterans center events statewide. In order to properly coordinate these events, state and local leadership will need to be involved from its earliest planning stages. Local businesses and chambers of commerce will also participate in the one-stop veterans center programs. Chairman Chorpenning asked if the VTF members felt that this directive had been adequately addressed through this recommendation. There was no opposition and the VTF final recommendation will include this explanation.

Chairman Chorpenning read recommendations, which had been decided in the 11/30/05 meeting (handouts were available to the VTF members and the public).

Continuing the Work of the Veterans Task Force

At the submission of its final recommendations of the VTF, it will cease to exist. Chairman Chorprenning asked the members if there was consensus amongst the VTF to create another body that would be responsible for actually carrying on the work of the VTF.

Upon the cessation of the VTF, it could be transformed in some fashion into another Governor committee. The newly formed Governor committee would then be assigned to conduct additional research recommended by the VTF.

Gary Yaquinto moved that upon submission of the recommendations, the VTF be somehow transformed into another group with the working title of Veterans Research Council. Chairman Chorprenning asked for discussion regarding the creating this new entity. It was felt that the Governor should establish it through Executive Order it was suggested that it have 15 members, representing all counties. There are some members on the VTF who will no longer be able to serve on the new Veterans Research Council. Suggested membership discussion was that 11 appointments would be made by the Governor, 2 by the President of the Senate, and 2 by the Speaker of the House. Another important consideration in establishing the Veterans Research Council is to require that it includes feedback from other organizations with similar mandates to support veterans (such as the Arizona Veterans Council, Arizona Veterans' Service Advisory Commission, Unified Arizona Commission, and others).

Gary Yaquinto asked if 18 months was a reasonable time for the Veterans Research Council to complete its research. Joe Bibich said that he felt that there have been issues that the VTF has not been able to work through, and he felt that the final report would not contain some issues for this legislative session because there simply not time to analyze issues.

Gary Yaquinto indicated that the VTF has done a laudable job in his opinion. He met with the Governor who has supported over \$12 million in general fund expenditures which will be added to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services budget. The expenditures profoundly increase the general funds available to provide veterans services.

Avtar Khalsa appreciated the Governor for accepting the recommendations, but cautioned that the Legislature would also need to be convinced. Chairman Chorprenning said that there will be public hearings when the budget is being heard and he would appreciate the VTF members' continuing support during these hearings. A list of all the Appropriations Committee members will be supplied to the VTF members.

The first recommendation to be included in the report to the Governor and the Legislature is to form a Veterans Research Council (a working title) responsible

for additional research on issues included in the VTF recommendations. Motion carried unanimously.

Patriotic specialty license plate

At the 11/30/05 meeting, the VTF recommended that the issue be tabled for further study. Representative John Nelson will be moving forward to work on this issue during this session. Chairman Chorpenning indicated that the process would not result in patriotic plates being available to the public for about one year. The law takes effect 90 days after sine die (when the Legislature ends the session). When the law takes effect, ADVS will begin to work with the Motor Vehicle Division on the license plate design.

Representative Russ Jones requested clarification from the VTF on one issue relative to the patriotic plate. It costs the State between \$30 and \$40 thousand to develop a new license plate and he was not sure how this cost would be paid. Chairman Chorpenning indicated that the license plate initiation cost would be paid by the Veterans Donation Fund, so there is no appropriation needed. Rep. Jones indicated that he felt that the bill stood a much better chance under this situation and Chairman Chorpenning told him that he was anxious to speak with him in more detail about the bill.

Avtar Khalsa moved to indicate support legislation to establish a new patriotic specialty license plate. The patriotic plate may be purchased by non-veterans and does not replace the veterans license plate currently available to qualified veterans and their dependents. After a second by Becky Phifer, the VTF unanimously approved the motion.

Failed Recommendation to Give State Income Tax Credit to Disabled Veterans

Senator Jim Waring worked on a bill last year regarding property tax reductions. There was significant discussion about such a proposal, in that the property tax is a county revenue and not a state issue. Any proposal that decreases county property taxes effectively reduces funding for schools. Sen. Waring has crafted another tax relief bill this year, but will designate it as a state income tax credit rather than a reduction in property tax.

Joe Bibich believes that the VTF should have an official opinion, especially since the recommendation failed to pass in the 11/30/05 meeting. Avtar Khalsa said that he agreed that the tax credit is a better approach than reducing property tax.

Gary Yaquinto suggested that since the VTF did not support the state income tax credit recommendation, it may wish to change it to a recommendation that additional study is needed. The members agreed and voiced their support of the bill being introduced by Sen. Waring.

Recommendation on 11/30/05 that Additional Study is Needed

Chairman Chorpenning wanted to request concurrence that the items tabled for additional study at the last meeting should be referred to the Veterans Research Council. The VTF agreed that the following items still required further study:

- Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program and Local Veterans Employment Representative Programs (DVOP/LVER)
- Concurrent memorials to the National Guard and Reservists
- Home Loan Program for Arizona Veterans

Additional VTF Recommendations:

Education - Michael Fugate provided an overview of issues of importance to Arizona veterans regarding education benefits. The motion to require that these issues require additional study unanimously carried.

Elderly – The funding issue described was dealt with at the 11/30/05 meeting and the recommendation does not need to be included in the list.

Homeless and Indigent Veterans – The motion to refer the issue for further study was approved unanimously.

Veterans with Disability – Joe Bibich requested additional information regarding the last recommendation under this category. The woman who spoke about this issue on 11/30/05 was a member of the Gold Star Mothers and Fathers, but made it clear that she was not speaking on their behalf. The Director offered to deal with the issue, due to the confusion over what she was actually requesting. The first three recommendations under the category were referred for further study by the Veterans Research Council. The motion carried unanimously.

Women and Minority Veterans – Chairman Chorpenning has a Women Veterans' Coordinator in place now and will be forming a Native American Veteran subcommittee in January 2006. He suggested the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services assume responsibility for these recommendations as part of their operations. The VTF moved to exclude the category from the final recommendations.

Rural Issues – Representation on the Veterans Research Council (the new group to be formed to continue VTF work) should not be limited to Maricopa and Pima Counties. Substantial numbers of veterans have difficulty accessing veterans services. The motion to include representatives from rural Arizona on the Veterans Research Council was unanimously approved.

National Guard and Reserve – The motion to refer the issue for further study was approved unanimously.

Incentives for Veterans to Relocate to or Remain in Arizona – Several ideas were discussed during the VTF meetings or recommended by stakeholders. The concepts require additional study by the Veterans Research Council. George Heaney said that other states identify veteran status on driver's licenses and suggested that Arizona consider doing the same. The VTF will include Mr. Heaney's recommendation with other incentives. The motion to refer these incentives for further study carried unanimously.

Service Delivery – The issues that were included in this section of the recommendations are assigned to ADVS and will not be included in the final recommendations.

Miscellaneous – The first of the two items listed will be moved under the category of the National Guard and the second recommendation is assigned to ADVS for action. The section will not be included in the final recommendations.

Call for Other Recommendations from the Task Force Members

VA Patient Advocates - Becky Phifer recommended that the VA Advocates be transferred to the ADVS. Bill Chagnon, Veterans of Foreign Wars, has worked with patient advocates at other VA Medical Centers and he felt they did a very good job. Caryn Walsh and Becky Phifer have both experienced first-hand and have been told that female veterans' medical needs are not being met. Joan Sisco said that this is probably an issue unique to female veterans accessing VA health care. Chairman Chorpenning said he will have ADVS conduct an internal investigation.

DVOP/LVER Program Transfer - Avtar Khalsa discussed the scope of responsibilities for the Dept. of Economic Security, a huge state agency. Veterans employment is a very small part of the department's mandates, and he believed that the program of veterans' employment would be best handled by ADVS. Chairman Chorpenning agreed that the program could be managed more effectively if individuals who are expert in veterans benefits worked with unemployed veterans, but felt that additional study is required before a recommendation could be made to the Governor.

Veterans' Preference for Public Service Jobs - Dora Schriro requested a change to the current law to increase preference points given to veterans applying for public service positions. In his experience, George Heaney said veterans make the best applicants for both correctional officers and law enforcement officers. He said that the applications could be processed with 5 preference points given to anyone who is disabled and 10 preference points to veterans, with a maximum number of preference points capped at 10 points. That would allow non-disabled veterans 10 total preference points when their applications are processed. Heaney wanted to clarify that disabled veterans would continue to receive 10 preference points; they make excellent employees working switchboards and

other types of work where their disabilities can be accommodated. The proposed change would allow non-disabled veterans a similar consideration. Ms. Schriro noted that the statutes were last changed in 1947. The VTF unanimously voted to include this recommendation in its final report, since there is no fiscal impact.

Ms. Schriro will meet with Chairman Chorpenning separately to discuss possible ways to encourage recruitment of veterans for correctional and law enforcement positions.

Receiving Military Service Credit as Public Employees - Joe Bibich asked if correctional officers could be allowed to include their military service in their total credited service for retirement. Such an incentive would undoubtedly encourage veterans to apply for public service jobs, such as correctional officer positions. Presently, veterans must purchase their military service time before it can be considered as part of the employee's retirement. Co-Chair Phifer felt that all state employees would benefit by receiving retirement credit for their military service. If a state employee is receiving a pension from the military, they are prohibited from purchasing retirement credit. Because there is a fiscal consideration, the issue will be recommended for further study. The recommendation will be included in the report as requiring additional study.

Training for Veterans - Joe Bibich asked about the possibility of providing specialized training that requires the trainee to sign an agreement to work for the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. Chairman Chorpenning is proposing the creation of a training center with the agency so that various training opportunities can be provided to fill vacancies (such as nursing). The recommendation is the responsibility of the ADVS and does not need to be included in the VTF recommendations.

Native American Veterans - Chairman Chorpenning announced that he will be forming a Native American Veteran subcommittee after the first of the year. The group will focus on issues of importance to the American Indian veterans.

Milton Bluehouse, Jr. requested to speak. He thanked Chairman Chorpenning and the VTF for considering Native American veterans. Mr. Bluehouse wanted to clarify something mentioned in an earlier VTF meeting regarding a veterans cemetery on tribal land. Any veterans cemetery would be available to all veterans and would not be limited to Native Americans. The formal recommendations from the VTF need to benefit all veterans, and he emphasized that tribes need to feel included. One request was to ensure the availability of veterans education benefits, and he asked if the VA includes D'Nai College on the Navajo Reservation. Chairman Chorpenning guaranteed Mr. Bluehouse that he would be involved in the Native American subcommittee work. There are obstacles to many minority veterans and he intends to engage all significant groups, especially the Native Americans.

Call to the Public - Larry Anderson, former Marine and a representative from the Navajo Nation, thanked the Task Force for its work. Mr. Anderson expressed his desire to get representation of the 22 tribes in Arizona. Chairman Chorprenning emphasized that he will be forming a Native American Veteran subcommittee in January.

Final Approval of the VTF Recommendations – Chairman Chorprenning will email everyone a transmittal letter for their review and approval before it is signed. He will present the report to the Governor's Chief of Staff. The President of the Senate indicated that the report will be accepted by his secretary, so there is no need to schedule a formal presentation. The same is probably true of the Speaker of the House. Chairperson Chorprenning and Co-Chairperson Phifer will present the information to the Legislature when the VTF has finalized its final report.

Chairman Chorprenning wanted to personally thank each and every one of the members for their service on the Veterans Task Force. The meeting was adjourned at 3:02. The VTF members were asked to meet at 3:15 at the Governor's office on the 9th floor.